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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 004810

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: TNA VOTE ON PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS LAW UNCERTAIN

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert S. Ford,
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[11.](#) (U) A final TNA vote on the provincial elections law was scheduled December 1, but the Assembly took no action due to a lack of quorum. The provincial elections law was amended from the one presented at the second reading November 28; it sets the date for local, municipal, and provincial elections "two months after the formation of the new government, except for the governorate councils of the region of Kurdistan" and places the responsibility for holding these elections on the IECI.

[12.](#) (C) TNA Legal Committee Chairman Muhsin Sa'adun told Poloff December 1 that he expects the TNA to leave it to the Council of Representatives to set a date for provincial council elections. Sa'adun said he had consulted the IECI and recognized that two months was too short a time frame for holding the vote. He said he expected the proposal to be read, criticized, and put off for the next government when the Assembly reconvenes on Sunday, December 4.

BACKGROUND

[13.](#) (U) The previous version of the bill set the date for provincial elections on February 11, 2006 in all governorates except those in Kurdistan. After the reading, Legal Committee Chairman Muhsin Sa'adun read a letter from IECI Chairman Izadin al-Mohammady, stating that the IECI could not conduct elections by the referenced date and that the IECI would need six months to prepare for such elections.

[14.](#) (U) A lively discussion ensued among the members, with some arguing for elections two or three months after the formation of the new government, and one even saying that elections should be held in one or two years so provincial and national elections could be held off-cycle. Another member argued that the IECI should expand its mandate and be responsible for elections for sub-provincial councils (e.g., district, municipal, neighborhood, etc.). Deputy Speaker Hussein Al-Shahristani referred the bill back to the Legal Committee and the Provincial and Governorate Affairs Committee to produce a modified draft for a final reading and vote.

[15.](#) (C) Ambassador on November 29 urged Abdel Aziz al-Hakim, the leader of the largest parliamentary bloc, the Shia Islamist Coalition, to move the date of the provincial elections back. Al-Hakim seemed to accept the idea. PolCouns explained the security challenges to influential Shia Islamist parliamentarian Sami al-Askeri November 28 who also seemed open to the idea of a delay.

COMMENT

[16.](#) (C) If this bill is passed as is, it could move the election date to late March. By contrast, if the provincial elections bill is not approved prior to adjournment, then there will be no date set for these elections. This would increase the prospects of a date that provides more time for adequate IECI preparation.
KHALILZAD